



Saint Josemaria Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

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Centro ELIS, founded in Rome nearly forty years ago, runs a series of training activities connected with employment and sports with one end in view: to help every boy who takes part in them to mature on both the human and the Christian plane.

Centro ELIS (which stands for *Educazione, Lavore, Istruzione, Sport* - Education, Work, Training, Sport) originated in an idea of Pope Pius XII's, who decided that the money donated by Catholics all over the world on the occasion of his eightieth birthday should go to set up a social project in Rome. Pope John XXIII entrusted Opus Dei with the management of this project and his successor Pope Paul VI officially opened Centro ELIS on 21 November 1965. In his speech on that occasion Pope Paul said that after World War II, when he visited different districts, he realised that education and training were the most important way of improving the lives of young unemployed people from poor families. On the same day he also inaugurated the next door Church of St John the Baptist in Collatino, which is looked after by Opus Dei priests, and the SAFI catering school which is also part of the ELIS Association

The ceremony was attended by Saint Josemaria, who had encouraged the project and followed its progress step by step. That day, in his speech to the Pope, Saint Josemaria said among other things: "It is with particular gratitude that Opus Dei has welcomed this request to work for the professional, human and Christian training of young workers. Not only because, as I like to say so often, Opus Dei wants to serve the Church as the Church wants to be served, but also because the task which we are being entrusted with perfectly matches the spiritual and apostolic characteristics of our Work. Whether in the formation of its own faithful or in the development of its apostolates, Opus Dei is always based on the individual's sanctification of his or her own work."

Centro ELIS has always had as its goal to help young men to develop their skills and talents to the utmost, and to overcome the problems with integrating into

society, and finding work, caused by their family circumstances and surroundings. Although the social context has changed over the years, this goal is still very necessary. More than 10,000 young people from different parts of Italy and other countries, thanks to the cooperation set up with developing countries, have benefited from the services provided by Centro ELIS.

The Centro ELIS Association is a recognised NGO for cooperation and development. It has set up or is in the process of setting up formational activities in Argentina, the Philippines, Ecuador, Uruguay, Vietnam, Brazil, China, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire and other places. The methodology of the ELIS NGO is based primarily on training local people to ensure the continuity of the various projects.

ELIS is also the focal point of a series of enterprises with specific characteristics and independent management, which all subscribe to a single "manifesto", sharing the same educational ideals and principles.

In Rome, for example, ELIS runs the **SAFI Catering School**, financed by donors' study grants for girls working to obtain a diploma in the catering sector. In Palermo, it runs the **SAME Catering School** offering free courses financed by the Sicilian local government.

Cedel ("ELIS social and educational cooperative"). Set up in 1985, it manages the ELIS and SAFI halls of residence for students in Rome, which offer accommodation to students at the ELIS and SAFI centres as well as tutors and teachers. The ELIS hall of residence offers two years' free accommodation and study facilities to young men aged between 19 and 24. They come mainly from the north of Italy to take courses in multimedia, telecommunications and maintenance financed by businesses in cooperation with ELIS. Cedel also manages the activities of the ELIS ICT Academy, which offers courses leading to a professional certificate in information technology and telecommunications to school-leavers and those already in work.

The Consel-Consorzio ELIS was set up in 1992 to foster long-term links with businesses. It is made up of more than 40 major companies in the fields of telecommunications, energy and the media. Its main aim is to link up job vacancies with jobseekers, and secondly to achieve a greater integration between schools, universities and businesses, through appropriately tailored careers guidance and training. Consel-Consorzio ELIS stimulates social responsibility in business projects.

The ELIS and SAFI sports centres run educational activities that combine sports with all-round character-training. This carries on a tradition started by the ELIS sports groups in the early 1960s.

ELIS also promotes publications and conferences aimed at personal and corporate audiences, on the value of work and service for building up the individual and society.

Saint Josemaria Escriva, referring to the work of spiritual formation, underlined the fact that precious stones are worked “one by one”. And it is precisely this idea that inspires all the activities of Centro ELIS: personalized attention to the pupils one by one, not *en masse*, working on the personality growth and the human virtues of each individual, work done well, and service to others. Anyone who freely wants to can take part in weekly classes on ascetical topics, in times expressly dedicated to prayer, or in meetings for reflection on doctrinal questions. Through these means, the Opus Dei prelature provides youths with an opportunity to acquire a genuine life of piety as sons of God, and a knowledge of Catholic faith and morals in line with their own cultural level, leading to progressive familiarity with genuine Christian living.

Further information: